

SUMMARIES

THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES: A SURVEY OF RECENT RESEARCH

Wim C. Delsman

This survey covers primarily the history of research since 1994. In the light of the most important questions of the study of Ecclesiastes the reader becomes acquainted with the latest scholarly literature. The topics to be discussed are the name of the book, the author, the structure and the composition, the origin, the relation to traditional wisdom, the status of the epilogue, and the time and place where the book found its origin. The article concludes with some words about the importance of the book for the modern reader.

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THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

Aart Schippers

Some eight centuries ago Bishop Langton divided the text of Ecclesiastes into twelve chapters. My proposal is to read the book as comprising nineteen periscopes, including a narrator's prologue and epilogue. To support my proposal, I describe the course pursued in defining the nineteen pericopes.

Next, in order to establish the interrelationship between the nineteen pericopes, a description of the structure of the middle periscope, the tenth, is given first, and after that the role of Solomon in which Qohelet appears, the so-called king-fiction, is discussed. The structural analysis of pericope 10 (6:3-9) shows how closely this pericope in the centre is connected with the opening poem in pericope 1 and with the final poem of pericope 19. As to the role of Solomon my suggestion is that this functions throughout the text of Qohelet, while there is a perceptible change in the disguise. Initially Qohelet speaks in the role of the rich and wise king who looks back on his life and reign, but from the middle of his text onwards he speaks as Solomon, famous for his wisdom as Solomon the wise man.

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ALL IS BREATH: THE MEANING OF THE WORD הָבֵל IN QOHELET

Pius Drijvers o.c.s.o

This article deals with one word, the word הָבֵל. This word occurs 38 times in the small book of Qohelet. The author investigates the original meaning of הָבֵל. הָבֵל means 'breath', a very light respiration, mostly invisible, which leaves nothing when it disappears. Research into the 35 occurrences of הָבֵל in Tenach (outside of Qohelet and Gen. 4) leads to the conclusion that in deuteronomistic circles the plural הַבָּלִים often means idols. The analysis of הָבֵל in the book Qohelet makes clear that Qohelet uses the word הָבֵל in its simple, concrete, original meaning, as he also does for other sometimes heavily loaded terms for wisdom as הַחֵמָה and צְדִיקָה. For Qohelet הָבֵל is an image of something that is useless and flies away as breath. This is in contrast to the current translations which follow LXX and Vulgate in their rendering 'vanity' and 'vanity of vanities'. Qohelet avoids religious or moralistic significance of the word הָבֵל. He only confirms emphatically the concrete and fugitive reality of human life as he sees and experiences it: 'All is breath'. Some treasures out of the Midrashim and the Talmud are added: about Abel, whose name literally is הָבֵל and about Matthew, whose name is ΜΑΤΘΑΙΟΣ, Greek translation of הָבֵל.

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THE ROLE OF GOD IN THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

Klaas A.D. Smelik

In Ecclesiastes a small number of verbs are associated with God as the subject of the sentence. The most important are נתן, 'to give', and עשה, 'to do'. In this article, a survey is given of the relevant passages in Ecclesiastes and an attempt is made to ascertain why the author has chosen these verbs. In conclusion, attention is drawn to the difference in view between Ecclesiastes and other books of the Hebrew Bible in regard to the way God acts.

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ECCLESIASTES IN THE MISHNAH

Ecclesiastes 1:5 and 4:12 as Quotations

Niek A. van Uchelen

Ecclesiastes cannot claim to be the most quoted book of the Old Testament in the Mishnah of the Rabbis. Only three times its sayings have found a

place as useful maxims between the prescriptive *misjnayot*. Thanks to their general and *chokmatic* character they easily seem to comply with the halakhic prescriptions.

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QOHELET IN INDONESIA AND ELSEWHERE: CONTEXTUAL EXEGESIS

B.F. Drewes

The study of a theological commentary of the book Qohelet, written by an Indonesian biblical scholar E. G. Singgih, is based on the question of the role of the context in the commentary. Besides the international theological discourse, the relationships of power in Indonesia and the situation of the local church and theology appear among others to be of influence in his exegesis. God is presented as 'the boss', who rules the world in an incomprehensible way. All people 'live under the shadow of death' (cf. the title of this commentary). This interpretation is compared with the commentary of the liberation theologian, Elsa Tamez. There are both similarities and differences between these commentaries: Tamez places Qohelet (and herself) in the context of the worldwide free market with its oppressive capitalism. She finds, for instance, in this Bible book a very different image of God. Finally, God shall replace the time of 'vanity' by better times. It is shown that the 'context' is not an objective factor, but that, consciously or unconsciously, authors place themselves in certain contexts. The study of these contexts can clarify why the exegesis of the same texts can lead to different commentaries.

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QOHELET: A SAGE BUT ALSO SHEPHERD AND TEACHER OF THE PEOPLE

Ecclesiastes 12: 9-12

Dries Blokker

The epilogue of the book calls Qohelet a sage who did not keep his wisdom for himself but who taught the people. African sources comment that elevated wisdom, contained in proverbs and sayings, is restricted to the circle of people with grey hair and to the royal court. The epilogue suggests that this also was the case in the Middle East but that Qohelet was an exception. By using proverbs and evident truths he included the voice of the people and their approval in his reflections. This use of proverbs is also found in the prophets, and is a rhetoric still very common in Africa.

Proverbs, parables, metaphors, in short *mesjalim*, are used to motivate and stimulate the community. The use of proverbial speech in his reflections puts Qohelet in the ranks of the teachers who addressed the people.

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THE BOOK OF QOHELET IN THE NEW DUTCH BIBLE TRANSLATION
A Description
Klaas Spronk

In 2004 the Catholic and Protestant Netherlands Bible societies will cooperatively publish a new Bible translation. Parts of it have been published already as a preview showing the way in which the translators try to find the right balance between being faithful to the source texts and using 'natural' Dutch. In the description of this preliminary translation special attention is paid to the reception of this new translation, the title Prediker (Preacher), to the translation of the motto in 1:2, the use of poetry, and to the style. It is also suggested to connect the last lines of 11:9 with 'and', instead of with 'but'.

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SOME REMARKS ON THE TRANSLATION OF ECCLESIASTES 3:5A
Jaap van Dorp

The unusual expressions of Ecclesiastes 3:5a are translated in different ways, e.g. the more literal *New Revised Standard Version* 'a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together' and the meaning based *Today's English Version* 'the time for making love and the time for not making love'. In the translation handbook on Ecclesiastes Graham Ogden and Lynell Zogbo leave undecided which of these translations is to be preferred. They suggest to have a footnote explaining the idiom. The poetic context of Ecclesiastes 3:5a however points at the sense as found in the *TEV*. A literal translation does not communicate the meaning of the Hebrew expression. Dependent on the scope of a translation project metaphors and more or less explicit paraphrases are adequate.

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QOHELET / קהלת: SOME NOTES AT THE *TRANSLATION TO BE READ*
ALoud AND A PRE-PUBLICATION OF 3:1-9
F.J. Hoogewoud / Leo van den Bogaard

In the series *A Translation to be Read Aloud* published by the Catholic and Protestant Netherlands Bible societies, the volume that will include the Hebrew and Dutch texts of Ecclesiastes (Qohelet) is scheduled to appear in the autumn of 2004. As a sample of this publication Ecclesiastes 3:1-9 is presented here, preceded by an introduction that stresses three points:

- * The Hebrew text has the absolute priority of over the Dutch translation.
- * The text is presented colometrically, in order to facilitate the reading aloud of the translation.
- * That what is implicit in the text is preferably being kept implicit in the translation rather than being explicated. The original images are maintained, also when, and even if, they need further explanation.